

the Christmas Eve of 1808, when he was only forty-eight, found him depressed by the feeling of having wasted his gifts in pursuing too many wandering fires. From his deathbed he wrote sadly to Davy describing himself as 'one who has scattered abroad the *avenafatua* of knowledge, from which neither branch nor blossom nor fruit has resulted\*.

It was largely true. The same judgement is passed on him by Atkinson in his *Medical Bibliography*<sup>1</sup> of 1834: 'His, works embrace the most extended surface of queries and inquiry; touching, like a vessel of discovery at every little topic or island; but yet, with topsails set, as if stinted to time. For as an author he appears to have been always in a hurry to reach the mart of novelty and invention, lest others should arrive there before him; so that it became through life a perpetual tilt and tournament for fame/

This verdict of one eccentric on another exaggerates, I suspect, the Doctor's thirst for mere notoriety. It is difficult to feel sure what he was really like, for the good Dr. Stock is no Boswell. Coleridge wrote that he was filled with pain and shame at the prospect of such a bio-grapher, and Southey suggested beforehand as a vignette

<sup>1</sup>rhis is a most curious compilation. It is dedicated to 'All Idle Medical Students\*, and its author, who had been surgeon to the Duke of York, shows all the freakishness that could be expected even from the son of a friend of Sterne. 'Wanting better amusement', he explains, 'I stumbled on this dry, dusty, tedious,

accursed, hateful  
bibliography.\* He certainly did not take the task too  
seriously. He  
only covered the letters A and B; and he adds: 'I  
have studiously  
avoided much communication with the Germans,  
or with their  
most excellent authors, and, in most humble  
deference, with the dead  
languages; for everything dead, except victuals, I  
abhor. And not-  
withstanding I possess Noehde's German Grammar  
or Syntax, yet I  
know not so much of that tongue as of a neat's  
tongue; or as a child  
just born. Nay, in point of guttural expression, I  
know less. The  
German tongue is to me most odontalgoid and  
difficult\*'